

XI. Description of two new Species of Didelphis from Van Diemen's Land. By G. P. Harris, Esq. Communicated by the Right Honourable Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. K.B. Pres. R.S. H.M.L.S.

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DIDELPHIS CYNOCEPHALA.

DIDELPHIS fusco-flavescens supra postice nigro-fasciata, caudâ compressâ subtus lateribusque nudâ.

TAB. XIX. Fig. 1.

The length of this animal from the tip of the nose to the end of the tail is 5 feet 10 inches, of which the tail is about 2 feet. Height of the fore part at the shoulders 1 foot 10 inches—of the hind part 1 foot 11 inches. Head very large, bearing a near resemblance to the wolf or hyæna. Eyes large and full, black, with a nictitant membrane, which gives the animal a savage and malicious appearance. Ears rounded, erect, and covered with short hair. Black bristles about 2 inches long on the upper lips, cheeks, eyebrows, and chin. Mouth very large, and extending beyond the eyes. Cutting teeth small, obtuse, 8 in the upper jaw, and 6 in the lower. Canine teeth 2 in each jaw, strong, 1 inch long. Twelve molares in the upper jaw and 14 in the lower, of which the four hindmost are trifurcate. The legs are short and thick in proportion to the length of its body. Fore feet 5-toed, claws black, short, and blunt, with a callous naked heel. Hind feet 4-toed, claws short, covered by tufts of hair extending 1 inch beyond them, with a
long

Didelphis ursina.



Didelphis cynocephala.



long callous heel, reaching to the knuckle. Tail much compressed, and tapering to a point, covered with short smooth hair on the upper part; sides and under part bare, as if worn by friction; not prehensile. Scrotum pendulous, but partly concealed in a small cavity or pouch in the abdomen. Penis projecting behind: glans forked.

The whole animal is covered with short smooth hair of a dusky yellowish brown, paler on the under parts, and inclining to blackish gray on the back. On the hind part of the back and rump are about 16 jet-black transverse stripes, broadest on the back, and gradually tapering downwards, two of which extend a considerable way down the thighs.

On dissecting this quadruped, nothing particular was observed in the formation of its viscera, &c., differing from others of its genus. The stomach contained the partly digested remains of a porcupine ant-eater, *Myrmecophaga aculeata*.

The history of this new and singular quadruped is at present but little known. Only two specimens (both males) have yet been taken. It inhabits amongst caverns and rocks in the deep and almost impenetrable glens in the neighbourhood of the highest mountainous parts of Van Diemen's Land, where it probably preys on the brush Kangaroo, and various small animals that abound in those places. That from which this description and the drawing accompanying it were taken, was caught in a trap baited with kangaroo flesh. It remained alive but a few hours, having received some internal hurt in securing it. It from time to time uttered a short guttural cry, and appeared exceedingly inactive and stupid; having, like the owl, an almost continual motion with the nictitant membrane of the eye.

It is vulgarly called the *Zebra Opossum*, *Zebra Wolf*, &c.

DIDELPHIS URSINA.

D. nigra maculis raris albis, auriculis calvis, caudâ subprehensili subtus nudâ.

Tab. XIX. *Fig. 2.*

This new species of Opossum is likewise an inhabitant of Van Diemen's Land, where it burrows in the ground, and preys on the smaller quadrupeds, &c.

Length from the tip of the nose to the end of the tail 2 feet 2 inches, of which the tail is 8 inches, and the head 6. Height from the fore heel to the top of the shoulder $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches. From the hind heel to the rump 7 inches $\frac{7}{10}$ ths. Head flat, and somewhat triangularly shaped. Distance from the nose to the eyes $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; between the eyes $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Ears rounded, naked. Eyes small, dark brown. Mouth large: 8 small cutting teeth; 2 strong canine ones three quarters of an inch long, and 8 grinders in the upper jaw; 6 cutting teeth, 2 canine, and 10 grinders in the lower jaw. Bristles over the eyes 6; on each side the nose 13 long, and several short ones; on each cheek 17 pointing backwards, and two tufts of 15 each under the chin pointing downwards. Fore feet 5-toed; inner toe shortest, claws sharp. Hind feet 4-toed, claws sharp, with tufts of hair extending half an inch beyond them. Heel long and callous. Tail slightly prehensile, its under part bare.

The whole head, body, legs, and upper part of the tail are covered with long coarse black hair, irregularly marked with one or two blotches of white; in some specimens on the shoulders, in others on the throat or rump.

The male is larger than the female, and has the scrotum pendulous, and the penis projecting behind. The female is furnished with the abdominal pouch, and brings forth four or five young ones

ones at a time, which, like the rest of this genus, are small, naked, and blind, adhering firmly by their mouths to the teats.

These animals were very common on our first settling at Hobart Town, and were particularly destructive to poultry, &c. They, however, furnished the convicts with a fresh meal, and the taste was said to be not unlike veal. As the settlement increased, and the ground became cleared, they were driven from their haunts near the town to the deeper recesses of forests yet unexplored. They are, however, easily procured by setting a trap in the most unfrequented parts of the woods, baited with raw flesh, all kinds of which they eat indiscriminately and voraciously; they also, it is probable, prey on dead fish, blubber, &c. as their tracks are frequently found on the sands of the sea shore.

In a state of confinement, they appear to be untameably savage; biting severely, and uttering at the same time a low yelling growl. A male and female, which I kept for a couple of months chained together in an empty cask, were continually fighting; their quarrels began as soon as it was dark (as they slept all day), and continued throughout the night almost without intermission, accompanied with a kind of hollow barking, not unlike a dog, and sometimes a sudden kind of snorting, as if the breath was retained a considerable time, and then suddenly expelled. The female generally conquered. They frequently sat on their hind parts, and used their fore paws to convey food to their mouths. The muscles of their jaws were very strong, as they cracked the largest bones with ease asunder; and many of their actions, as well as their gait, strikingly resembled those of the bear.

The specimen from which the drawing was made was a very fine male, in the possession of Lieutenant Governor Collins, and was put on board the Ocean transport, as a present to Sir Joseph Banks, but died before the vessel left New South Wales.

Its vulgar name is the *Native Devil*.